



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES (CS) OF PROFICIENT AND
LESS PROFICIENT L2 SPEAKERS**

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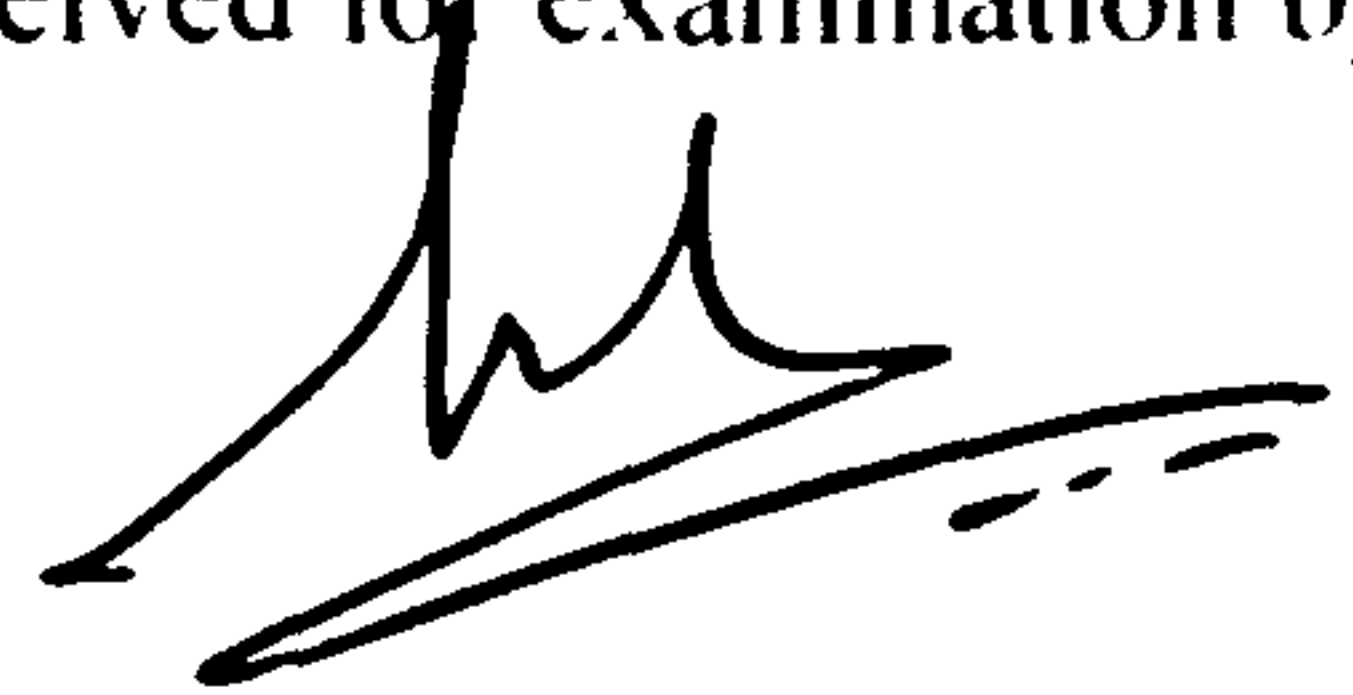
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The project entitled **Communication Strategies (CS) of proficient and less proficient L2 speakers** was prepared by Grace Phan Yiing Ling and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science with Honours (Teaching English as a Second Language).

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES (CS) OF PROFICIENT AND LESS PROFICIENT L2 SPEAKERS

Grace Phan Yiing Ling

This study reports on the relationship between use of communication strategies (CS) by L2 speakers and their language proficiency. It discusses the number and types of CS used by proficient and less proficient L2 speakers, whether L1-based or L2-based CS are used more, and whether CS tend to be used more to overcome communication problems or to enhance message. Data are obtained in the form of oral conversations by ten pairs of undergraduates discussing a given topic in English. Conversation transcripts were analyzed based on the interactional perspective of CS identified by Tarone (1978) and the pragmatic perspective suggested by Clennell (1995). This study proves that CS does vary with language proficiency, as more than half of the CS used by proficient speakers were to enhance message, whereas the less proficient mostly used CS to overcome problems in communication. In terms of L1 and L2-based CS, the proficient used more L2-based CS and the less proficient used a near equal number of both L1 and L2-based CS. The pattern of CS used by proficient and less proficient L2 speakers has implications on present CS researches and on the teaching of CS to less proficient L2 speakers.

ABSTRAK

STRATEGI KOMUNIKASI (CS) *L2 SPEAKER* MAHIR DAN KURANG MAHIR

Grace Phan Yiing Ling

Kajian ini melaporkan hubungan di antara penggunaan strategi komunikasi (CS) oleh *L2 speakers* dan kemahiran bahasa mereka. Ia membincangkan bilangan dan jenis CS yang digunakan oleh *L2 speaker* yang mahir dan yang kurang mahir, sama ada *L1-based* atau *L2-based* CS lebih sering digunakan, dan sama ada CS lebih cenderung digunakan untuk mengatasi masalah komunikasi ataupun untuk *enhance message*. Data dikumpul dalam bentuk perbualan lisan oleh sepuluh pasang prasiswazah yang berbincang tentang topic yang diberikan, dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Transkrip perbualan dianalisa berdasarkan perspektif interaksi CS yang dikenal pasti oleh Tarone (1978) dan perspektif pragmatik yang disyorkan oleh Clennell (1995). Kajian ini membuktikan bahawa CS memang berbeza mengikut kemahiran bahasa, kerana lebih daripada separuh CS yang digunakan oleh *speaker* mahir adalah bagi tujuan *enhance message* manakala *speaker* kurang mahir lebih banyak menggunakan CS untuk mengatasi masalah komunikasi. Dari segi *L1-* dan *L2-based* CS, *speaker* mahir menggunakan lebih *L2-based* CS dan yang kurang mahir menggunakan bilangan yang hampir sama untuk kedua-dua *L1-* dan *L2-based* CS. Corak penggunaan CS oleh *L2 speaker* mahir dan kurang mahir mempunyai implikasi terhadap kajian-kajian CS pada masa ini dan terhadap pengajaran CS kepada *L2 speaker* kurang mahir.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BM	<i>Bahasa Melayu</i> (Malay Language)
CS	Communication Strategies
IL	Interlanguage
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
NL	Native Language
TL	Target Language
UNIMAS	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the research problem

In acquiring proficiency in a second language (L2), L2 speakers go through a stage of development known as interlanguage (IL). This happens because the L2 speaker has not achieved native-speaker competence in the language. In the process, they face problems in communication and use strategies to overcome them, such as using the linguistic structures of their first language, or directly inserting a word from their first language. Many studies have been done to expand on the idea of communication strategies (CS) as not only to solve immediate communication problems by L2 speakers but also used by native speakers when faced with the “tip of the tongue” situation or to enhance message. Communication strategies generally mean plans that a language speaker uses to convey meaning in a communication situation, with and without the interlocutor’s cooperation (Faerch & Kasper, 1984; Tarone, 1981).

In an early research, the types of communication strategies were classified in a taxonomy of communication strategies (Tarone, 1978). These include oral communication strategies, which are L1-based and L2-based in nature, avoidance strategies and miming. However, the terms L1-based and L2-based in the use of

communication strategies were only proposed in later studies (Bialystok & Frohlich, 1984).

L1 based strategies uses the L1 resources to convey meaning, like code-switching and transliteration. L2 based strategies uses strategies in the target language like paraphrasing to convey the intended meaning (Bialystok, 1984).

The communication strategies used, whether L1-based, L2-based, or both, varies according to speakers' target language proficiency (Tarone 1977, in Ellis 1985; Ellis 1983 in Ellis, 1985). Speakers with higher language proficiency use more L2-based strategies than L1-based strategies (Bialystok & Frohlich, 1980; Paribakt, 1985). As for the effects of strategy use, L2-based strategies are more effective to convey the intended message as compared to L1-based strategies (Bialystok & Frohlich, 1980).

However, research also showed that proficiency does not influence the choice of communication strategies. When the speaker uses two languages, namely, the speaker's native language and second language, language speakers choose the same communication strategies regardless of language (Poulisse & Schils, 1989 cited in Bialystok, 1990). This finding is in conflict with the previous findings that use of CS depends on language proficiency.

In most of those studies, the focus is on the use of CS between native speakers and L2 speakers in a target language, as well as between two languages that are speakers' native language and their L2. It is necessary to explore further into situations whereby both speakers are using their L2 and who have lived in a multilingual speech country for an extended period of time. More in-depth studies need to be done to compare the CS used by multilingual L2 speakers in a language that is non-native to them. In addition, previous research has found out that CS are not only used to overcome communication difficulties, they also serve to enhance message in the target language, essentially by native speakers (Clennell, 1995). More studies need to find out whether L2 speakers use CS more to enhance message or to solve communication problems.

1.2 Purpose of study

Malaysian L2 speakers generally face the problem of acquiring high proficiency and fluency in English. This becomes even more prominent as the education policy changes from using English medium to Malay medium, where students only use English during the English language subject, and only recently, for Science and Mathematics. As a result, they often face problems when communicating in the English language, particularly when they enter university with English as one of the medium of instruction. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out whether proficient L2 speakers of English use the same communication strategies as the less proficient speakers. It specifically aims to:

1. identify and compare the number and types of communication strategies used by proficient and less proficient L2 speakers in their non-native language
2. determine whether L1-based or L2-based strategies predominate in communication to find out how much the L2 speaker are relying on their L2 resources to negotiate meaning
3. determine whether CS tend to be used more to overcome communication problems or to enhance message, and how language proficiency influences this.

1.3 Operational definitions of terms

1.3.1 Communication strategies

Communication strategies is “a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared” (Tarone, 1979). This study focuses on CS as ways to ensure that the interlocutor understands the speakers’ message. Therefore, two aspects of CS are taken into account:

- CS as ways that an L2 speaker use to overcome problems or difficulties in communication

- CS as ways to ensure that the main message is understood by the interlocutor, through topic maintenance or highlighting the topic.

The following criteria are used to analyze the communication strategies used. Tarone (1978, in Tarone 1980) provides a taxonomy of the types of CS, which is a rather exhaustive list built up through compiling CS described by key researchers in this field.

1. Paraphrase

- a. Approximation – use of a single target language vocabulary item or structure, which the learner knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item to satisfy the speaker

For example: Using the word “pipe” for “waterpipe”

- b. Word coinage – the learner makes up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept

For example: Coining the word, “airball” for “balloon”

- c. Circumlocution – the learner describes the characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appropriate target language (TL) item or structure.

For example: “Made from metal, used to clip papers together” to mean a stapler.

2. Borrowing

- a. Literal translation – the learner translates word for word from the native language.

For example: “disturb the water” to mean “stir”, direct translation from Bahasa Melayu (BM)

- b. Language switch – the learner uses the native language (NL) term without bothering to translate.

For example: “This thing is *senget*” to mean “slanting”

3. Appeal for assistance – the learner asks for the correct term

For example: “How do you say it?”

4. Mime – the learner uses non-verbal strategies in place of a lexical item or action

5. Avoidance

- a. Topic avoidance – the learner simply tries not to talk about concepts for which the TL item or structure is not known.

For example:

A: What do you think about recycling to reduce pollution?

B: I...think the rubbish should not be...thrown anyhow.

- b. Message abandonment – the learner begins to talk about a concept but is unable to continue and stops in mid-utterance.

For example: "I also think... Yesterday I heard..."

1.3.2 L1 and L2-based strategies

1.3.2.1 L1-based strategies

The information used in communication strategies may be taken from "the learner's source language, or any language other than the target language" (Bialystok, 1984), that is, *borrowing* from the taxonomy above. For example, language switch, using another language other than the target language, "I think they cannot be...too *cincai*." Or using the target language to directly translate a phrase from another language, like "This thing, sure can one."

1.3.2.2 L2-based strategies

The information that is derived from “the target language itself” (Bialystok, 1984), that is, *paraphrase* from the taxonomy above. By using this strategy, the L2 speaker does not revert to L1 or another language, but tries to overcome communication problems by using the L2. One example of approximation is “Last time I took care of...an animal”, by generalizing the word, *guinea pig* to *an animal*. Paraphrase also includes word coinage, “pig rabbit” to mean a guinea pig, or using circumlocution to describe the guinea pig, “Looks like rabbit but small and have short ears.”

1.4 Significance of the study

This study aims to find out whether CS use varies with the language proficiency of L2 speakers. Results from this study could provide insights to contribute to the field of communication strategies, in which researchers in the field would gain further understanding of the relationship between strategy use and L2 proficiency, especially in a language that is non-native to the L2 speaker. It would lend knowledge of the use of CS in overcoming communication problems, or enhancing messages, as much research has been on L2 speakers’ use CS to solve communicative problems but little on using CS to enhance messages in communication. Knowledge of the patterns of CS use among L2 speakers with different language proficiency would substantiate the idea of previous findings that certain strategies might be related to language proficiency, and which requires more advanced skills to employ as compared to other

strategies. It aims to find out whether L2 speakers use more L1 or L2-based strategies when they are more proficient in a language, and which of these two are used more when they are less proficient in a language. Knowing which CS are used more often by L2 speakers who are more proficient in the language could help those with lower proficiency in the language where they can be taught CS that are useful in helping them to develop successful communication, even with limited language resources (Dornyei & Thurrel, 1991).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication strategies (CS) has received a lot of attention since Selinker (1972) came up with the idea of Interlanguage (IL) which is the process that an L2 speaker goes through while learning or acquiring a target language. Speakers using IL have not acquired native-speaker proficiency in the target language. They activate a certain language structure in the brain where there are five processes underlying IL behavior, one of them being CS. CS is generally defined as attempts made by the speaker to communicate meaning across to the interlocutor (Tarone, 1978 in Tarone 1980; Faerch & Kasper, 1984), which includes borrowing from another language, paraphrasing, miming and avoidance strategies. CS are important as communication breakdowns frequently occur, specifically among L2 speakers using IL with limited knowledge of the target language. The ability to use CS to communicate effectively with others is also known as strategic competence, which, according to Canale and Swain (1980, cited in Tarone, 1980), is a part of communicative competence. This study intends to find out how CS is used in the interlanguage of the L2 speaker and the extent to which that strategic competence is related to their proficiency in the ILs.

Most of the past researches concentrated on the use of CS to overcome problems in communication and neglected their role as message enhancers (Clennell, 1995). This study focuses on both roles of CS.

In order to communicate meaning to others, various types of CS are used, such as L1-based or L2-based, depending on the speaker's use of his or her first language or the target language in conveying a message (Bialystok, 1984 in Faerch & Kasper, 1984). Previous research have determined several factors that influence the choice of L1-based or L2-based CS and the other types of CS, such as proficiency in a target language (Paribakt, 1985), the nature of the problem (Tarone, 1977 cited in Ellis 1985) and personality (Tarone 1977 cited in Ellis, 1985). Yet most of them focus on differences between native speakers and non-native speakers in one or two languages. This study concentrates only on non-native L2 speakers of IL who are proficient and less proficient in the language.

This chapter will thus describe the roles of CS in interlanguage and communicative competence, and then go on to explain the two theoretical perspectives of CS given by Tarone (1978 in Tarone 1980) and Faerch and Kasper (1984). Further on, the functions and types of CS will be discussed followed by the factors influencing use of CS.